

November 4, 2009

WASHINGTON, D.C. – This morning, U.S. Representatives Martin Heinrich (NM-1) and Ben Ray Luján (NM-3) joined Speaker Nancy Pelosi and other members of Congress for a meeting in the Capitol with Jefferson Keel, president of the National Congress of American Indians, and other tribal leaders to highlight the benefits of health insurance reform to the Native American community.

“Our country desperately needs health insurance reform—but our pursuit of reform cannot leave Native Americans behind,” said Rep. Heinrich. “I represent tens of thousands of Native Americans in central New Mexico, and my constituents have made it clear that they cannot wait any longer for health care reform in Indian Country.”

“On this historic day, I was honored to join distinguished Tribal leaders to discuss critical changes to the health insurance reform legislation that will greatly benefit the Indian people,” said Rep. Luján. “As I’ve traveled my district, I’ve visited tribal lands and spoken with Indian people about their needs and the needs of their communities. One of their primary needs is an improved health system. That’s why we worked together for the inclusion of language that will reauthorize the Indian Health Care system and continue funding for health services for American Indians and Alaska Natives--helping to make long-awaited improvements to the system, enhancing and expanding care, and better addressing the unique needs of people in Indian Country.”

“It is a shame that it has taken this long to reauthorize the Indian Health Care Act,” said Rep. Teague who has supported reauthorizing the Indian Health Care Act as a stand-alone measure. “The government needs to honor the commitments it made. Securing a steady source of

funding for the Indian Health Care System will mean increased access and provide better quality care for southern New Mexico's Native American families. The House must pass a reauthorization and improvement of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act."

Last week, the House unveiled the blended health insurance reform bill H.R. 3962, the Affordable Health Care for America Act, which provides significant protections for Native Americans. Taxpayers who are eligible for health care services as members of a federally-recognized Indian Tribe are treated as having satisfied the individual responsibility requirement. Health coverage that is provided by a tribe to a tribal member is excluded from the tribal member's taxable income. Standards for qualified health benefit plans, including the public option, are modified to provide for rules regarding Indian enrollees and Indian health care providers.

Language to permanently reauthorize the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCIA), which governs the Indian Health Care System (IHS), is also included in H.R. 3962. IHS is the provider of choice for many Native American patients. Unfortunately, IHCIA was last reauthorized in 1992, and that reauthorization expired eight years ago. Reauthorization will allow much-needed reforms to the Indian Health Service to move forward.

To access *H.R. 3962, the Affordable Health Care for America Act* online, visit: http://docs.house.gov/rules/health/111_ahcaa.pdf